

# Human Beyond Climate Change

*Organizational Becomings in the  
Everyday of Human Ocean Practices*

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# Content

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                                       | <b>3</b>  |
| AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION                                 | 4         |
| <b>MY LIBRARY OF ANIMATED THOUGHT</b>                     | <b>5</b>  |
| CLIMATE CHANGE, ANTHROPOCENTRISM, AND CONCEPTUAL OPENINGS | 5         |
| <i>A contemporary echo from the past</i>                  | 6         |
| <i>The reanimation of a critique of anthropocentrism</i>  | 7         |
| POSTHUMANISM, AND THE PROJECT AT HAND                     | 11        |
| <i>A brief overview</i>                                   | 11        |
| <i>A personal reading</i>                                 | 15        |
| <i>The project at hand</i>                                | 16        |
| <b>METHOD AND THE FIELD</b>                               | <b>18</b> |
| ENCOUNTERING THE FIELD                                    | 18        |
| <i>Cabo Verde, climate change, and the ocean</i>          | 19        |
| <i>Short reflections from a pre-visit</i>                 | 21        |
| METHODOLOGY   | 22        |
| <i>Qualitative, agential</i>                              | 22        |
| <i>Post-qualitative, diffractive</i>                      | 24        |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>                                       | <b>26</b> |

# Introduction

“As the climate catastrophe unfolds, it will shake the very idea of what it means to be human ever more profoundly”. (De Cock et al., 2021, p. 476)

Many crises and grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015; Gümüşay et al., 2022) have shaken the foundations of a predictable, plannable, and manageable world, available for humans to control, produce, or chose. But none has posed a greater challenge than climate change (IPCC, 2023; Wenzel et al., 2020). Two hundred years of industrial activity has altered the chemistry of planet Earth in ways never experienced by humanity, potentially putting humanity’s own survival at risk (Wright & Nyberg, 2017). In the midst of climate change there’s a growing interest to better understand how to organize in close alignment with nature (e.g., Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021; Labatut, 2023; Purser et al., 1995). There’s a critique of current organizing as overly anthropocentric, furthering what Nyberg et al. (2022) call a climate enlightened business-as-usual, which fails to seriously and creatively challenge the basic assumptions of organizing-as-we-know-it.

According to Wright et al. (2013, p. 649), climate change does not only present a physical threat to human existence, but also “a conceptual challenge to the way in which we imagine that existence”. To meet that challenge, they suggest, much more attention must to be paid to how predominant economic, social, and political imaginaries stand in the way of transformative action. As suggested by De Cock et al. (2021), asking such ‘big questions’ allows for less anthropocentric organizational possibilities, for new imaginaries that are not based on a human entitlement to Earth (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021). Yet, despite good intentions to foster more sustainable and resilient ways of organizing (Labatut, 2023), anthropocentrism prevails (Ergene & Calás, 2023). As a result, current practices run the risk of merely leading to more of the same (Berkowitz, 2023; Ergene & Calás, 2023), namely a human-centric extractivist relation to nature, as detrimental and existentially threatening to non-human others as to humans themselves – a continuation of the industrial activity that has turned the human into a geological force in its own right (Steffen et al., 2011).

The challenges of climate change are increasingly addressed in both affirmative and critical ways (Raffnsøe et al., 2022), exploring the basic assumptions of organizational relations between humans and nature (De Cock et al., 2021; Ergene & Calás, 2023). This is not least visible in how posthumanist thinking, with its radical decentring of human exceptionalism, is gaining momentum also in organization studies (e.g., de Vaujany et al., 2024). The aim of this

research project is to contribute to that development by exploring organizational becomings with human nature entanglements.

A particularly challenging area in that regard is the ocean (Berkowitz, 2023). While it plays a specific and crucial role in supporting life on Earth (IPCC, 2022, p. 381), its vastness and remoteness tends to be associated with infinite resources and a bottomless capacity to absorb pollution and litter (Berkowitz, 2023). While human ocean relations are creatively explored in various scholarly disciplines (e.g. Carson, 1998; Oppermann, 2023; e.g. Shefer et al., 2023), they're more scarcely addressed in management and organization studies (Berkowitz, 2023), also in research with a critical ecocentric approach. This shortage of asking the big questions and stimulating new forms of noticing (De Cock et al., 2021) with regards to the ocean runs the risk of contributing to upholding an anthropocentric paradigm of ocean exploitation (Berkowitz, 2020). As a result, even well-intended initiatives to build sustainable practices for human nature relations with the ocean, such as the UN-based notion of the Blue Economy meant to foster both economic growth and ecological longevity, might inadvertently put further pressures on an already strained ecosystem, unless geared towards “ensuring a harmonious, interdependent, sustainable evolution of both humans and nonhumans” (Berkowitz, 2023, p. 72).

## Aim and Research Question

This project engages with the organizational entanglements of human ocean relations, taking a critical posthumanist approach (e.g. Braidotti, 2019; Calás et al., 2023; de Vaujany et al., 2024). Focusing on “the boundary-making practices by which the ‘human’ and others are differentially delineated and defined” (Cozza & Gherardi, 2023b, p. 8), it homes in on the differentiation processes of human and ocean, as they become across social domains and inform organizational practices. The aim is to explore less anthropocentric organizational possibilities, contributing to the field of organization studies by challenging human-centric paradigms and proposing new ways of thinking about organizational entanglements with the ocean. The study takes a qualitative approach, engaging in a one-year multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) in Cabo Verde, a Small Island Developing State highly exposed to the threats and challenges of climate change (UNDP, 2024), and with a both current and historically strong and complex relation to the ocean.

Based on this framing, the following question will serve as a guide: *How are human ocean entanglements differentiated and performed in the everyday practices of organizing with the ocean?*

## My library of animated thought

As MacLure (2024, p. 1647) suggests, "[t]he library is lifeless until we begin to trace a path through it". This section is an invitation to follow the path that I've carved this far in my reading, and how it has animated my thoughts. Not every divergence in the library will be accounted for, and not every notion that has mattered along the path will find its place here. But it shows my attempt to navigate the research field(s), to in that sense position my study, and to start a conversation with sources I believe can be helpful in exploring that which I'm curious to explore. As such, it's also an invitation to you as a reader to both question my path, and to indicate other corners that I can venture.

I will start with a brief reading of how climate change is being approached in organization studies, with a particular focus on the critique of human-centred agendas and anthropocentrism. I will then delve into posthumanism as an approach that might offers a non-anthropocentric possibility, and which might be helpful for approaching the empirical field.

### Climate Change, Anthropocentrism, and Conceptual Openings

The last decade or so has seen a heightened tension on the subject of climate change in organization studies (Dahlmann, 2024). A mounting critique is pointing to an inadequacy in how organisations and organization research is responding to what is increasingly perceived as an existential crisis for humans and non-humans alike (De Cock et al., 2021). While sustainability and green initiatives are commonplace words both in business and in research, critical organization scholars are pointing to how a management-based, growth-driven, and human-centred logic of business-as-usual is preventing transformative action with regards to organizational relations with the environment (Nyberg et al., 2022; Tregidga et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2018).

As someone starting to engage with this field, eager to learn about and contribute to rethinking what it means to organize in a time of climate change, it might seem like a perfect scholarly timing. Potentially true, a quick dive into the history of climate change in organization studies also provides a rather uncanny feeling of looking into a mirror, of looking at a past that eerily resembles the present – the same crisis highlighted by scholars, with similar arguments for what isn't working in the relation between organizations and the environment, and many similar approaches to how to promote change.

### *A contemporary echo from the past*

Climate change first started to play a more significant role in organization research in the 1990's (see e.g. de Figueiredo & Marquesan, 2022; Ergene et al., 2021). By then, environmentalists had already for several decades criticized the effects that corporations had on the environment (Purser et al., 1995), yet in the field of business the subject remained marginal (Shrivastava, 1994). With the gain of momentum in the 1990's, that also seemed like a promising time for transformative change. However, according to de Figueiredo and Marquesan (2022), looking back at that period rather leads to “a bittersweet longing for a lost opportunity” (ibid, p. 2).

The research was initially fragmented and diverse. However, as it got more established, two distinct approaches began to emerge, one critical and one managerial, differentiated not least by opposing views on the notion of sustainability (Ergene et al., 2021). While the critical stream opposed what they saw as a fundamental problem of prioritizing profitability over ecological sustainability, the managerial stream emphasized the importance of said profitability and how a sustainability agenda could, e.g., serve the purpose of strategic and competitive advantage (Ergene et al., 2018). Eventually, the managerial approach became the dominant one, mainly focusing on how organizations could minimize risk and maximize opportunity in relation to nature and climate change (De Cock et al., 2021; Nyberg & Wright, 2016). As a result, a notion such as sustainability continues to be “based on an economic, not ecological, rationality and embodies the same view of nature as classical economic thought” (Labatut, 2023, p. 1231). And, while more recent ideas about sustainable business models indeed have the ambition to be more radically transformative, they still tend to ignore a contradiction at a systemic level between economic value creation and unsustainable resource extraction (Ergene et al., 2021; Tregidga et al., 2018). According to Wright & Nyberg (2015), corporate environmentalism became a story of win-win in the relation between business and the natural environment, where building a better world was seen to go hand in hand with building a better business. A win-win that, according to De Cock et al. (2021, p. 469) “marginalizes deeper and more radical criticism of the role of business and capitalism as central causes of the climate crisis”. As suggested by Hoffman & Georg (2012, p. 20), this development and the critique thereof may indeed, on the one hand, be attributed to an emphasis within the field “on business rather than the natural environment”, but on the other hand “it could also be that mainstream theories are ‘blind’ to certain issues and that we need to develop different lenses through which we can view and assess the relationship between business and the natural environment.”

While my research does not engage specifically with the notion of sustainability, I find this development telling for how to understand the critique of climate change in organization research today, in how it highlights a mainstreaming and managerialisation of potentially transformative concepts, as with sustainability in its origin, and how it calls for more radical and bold approaches to researching organizational relations with nature. For example, in reviewing the discussion on climate change within the field of business and society, Nyberg et al. (2022) highlight how a compatibility between business interests and planetary interests are seemingly taken for granted, in their view serving to support an agenda of what they call a climate enlightened business-as-usual. Stating that “there is arguably a need to take a bolder approach to theorizing the intersection between business, society, and climate change” (ibid, p. 1324), they suggest a particular focus on time and space, on the particularities of the spatiotemporal contexts that organizations are embedded in, moving away from firm-centred interpretations of the natural environment. Echoing this critique of firm-centric approaches, Ergene et al. (2021) raise a concern that organization studies has too much of a business case orientation, too much of problematizing climate change in relation to the risk for the individual firm, promoting incremental change and profit maximization rather than transformative and ecologically centred action. Suggesting a number of shifts in the scholarly approach, they argue for an agenda that “compels the foregrounding of the *political* in our scholarly endeavors” (ibid., p. 1324, emphasis in original), which would for example mean to justify the existence of an organization on socio-ecological terms, rather than on its capacity for economic growth.

Much of this critique focuses on a capitalist logic as the core of the problem (e.g. Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021; Tregidga et al., 2018; Wright & Nyberg, 2015). However, with just a slight shift of reading, it can also be seen to address a fundamental view that Earth, the natural environment, the world that we live in, is *for us*. Both in the sense of its resources being for us to extract and make use of, and in the sense of it being available for us to control, manage, and make predictable. In other words, an amounting critique of an *anthropocentrism*, a human-centeredness, in how we as humans organize (in) the world.

### *The reanimation of a critique of anthropocentrism*

The critique of anthropocentrism is a critique of human exceptionalism, of humans as “ontologically separate and superior to nature” (Ergene & Calás, 2023, p. 1962). In an organizational setting, that means to take for granted a fundamental dualism between organizations and nature. As such, anthropocentrism is “an ontological position that influences the code of ethics toward nature” (Purser et al, 1995, p. 1054). In other words, a position that

has implications for world-making (Chia, 2003; Goodman, 1978), for how realities are conceived of and (re)produced.

This critique is also not new. The 1990's also saw a discussion on the problems of favouring human interests at the expense of the environment. For example, Purser et al. (1995) pointed to the necessity of a revolutionary shift of paradigm, from one of environmental management, inherently anthropocentric, to one of ecocentric responsibility, where anthropocentrism is rather seen "as the deeper cause of environmental problems" (ibid., p. 1069). While described as necessary, such a shift was in no way seen as a given or as easy to achieve. And, as I've sketched out above, with the managerial view becoming the dominant approach to climate change in organizations studies, with ecocentrism being overshadowed by sustaincentrism (de Figueiredo & Marquesan, 2022), the environmental management paradigm prevailed. Fast-forwarding to current research, anthropocentrism is again starting to be highlighted as the very crux of the environmental crisis, however still described as a notion largely overlooked in the literature (e.g. Ergene & Calás, 2023; Jørgensen & Fatien, 2024).

#### How is anthropocentrism a problem?

Anthropocentrism in the organizational context can be seen to have two primary negative implications. One, the problem of what it does. And two, the problem of what it prevents doing. The first implication is much in line with the critique presented above, in my initial overview of climate change in organization studies. Thus, human exceptionalism as resulting in an extractivist logic, where the environment serves as a resource for human needs and aspirations (Berkowitz, 2023; Daskalaki & Fotaki, 2024), where climate change is at best treated as a grand challenge that suggests major shifts in organizational approaches (Gümüşay et al., 2022), but where it more commonly is merely perceived as a threat to be managed, a risk to control (Nyberg & Wright, 2016). As I mentioned above, a logic of the environment and nature as being *for us*. This critique of what anthropocentrism does is also one that warns of "the futility of relying on the same thinking that has contributed to the planetary crisis in the first place" (Nyberg et al., 2022, p. 1324).

The second implication, what anthropocentrism prevents doing, is about how a taken for granted and largely unreflected human exceptionalism stands in the way of exploring and questioning the basic dualistic assumptions of organizational relations with nature (Labatut, 2023; Purser et al., 1995). And as such, how it stands in the way of finding new relationalities, new ways of being with Earth, more regenerative (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021) or fundamentally other (Calás & Smircich, 2023). Here again, there was an already early critique of how an



environmental management paradigm “avoids the necessity of having to examine the deeper philosophical causes of the ecological crisis” (Purser et al., 1995, p. 1075). Echoed in the more recent words of Tregidga et al. (2018, p. 294), “[l]eft unaddressed are the hidden assumptions and actions that continue to facilitate dominant economic, social, and anthropocentric relations”.

Perhaps a difference between the 1990’s and current research is how this second implication is conceptualized and emphasized. There seems to be a more acute sense today of an existential crisis presented by climate change (De Cock et al., 2021), and subsequently, a more acute need to find new approaches to organizational relations with nature (Ergene & Calás, 2023). It’s visible in the many attempts to revitalize or reconceptualize the notion of sustainability (some refs), as partly discussed above, but also in more far-reaching attempts to question the very understanding of the world we live in. A case in point is Campbell et al (2019). In their view, climate change is “a discontinuity that renders unrecognizable everything that has come before” (ibid., p. 737). As such, they suggest, it evades any attempts of framing, of being bounded and demarcated. What if, they ask, climate change is actually unframeable? What if its key features are its unboundedness, incalculability and unthinkability? What if climate change is impossible for organizations to contain, escaping known forms of planning, organizing, and theorizing? Rather than seeing it as a problem to address, as something to manage and control, Campbell et al. (2019) suggest an ontologization of climate change, to see it as making up the very world we live in. In their words, “climate change is the end of a background: organizations exist within it, because nothing will exist outside it” (ibid., p. 739).

Such a lens allows for a shift away from asking questions about how to organize despite or in the face of climate change, to instead asking less anthropocentric, even post-anthropocentric questions of what it means to organize in a world that *is* climate change, beyond the mastery of humans. In that sense, Campbell et al. (2019) are a good example of how organization studies, in a critique of anthropocentric approaches to climate change, seems to be engaging ever more deeply with the basic or ‘big’ questions about ‘what is’ and ‘how to know’, of ontology and epistemology. In my view, such deep engagements with the dichotomy of organization and nature point to a renewed and perhaps this time more transformative possibility of rethinking organization and climate change, not as tweaks of incremental change towards increased resilience, but as the possibility of the unthought. In other words, and to reconnect with how Purser et al. (1995) and Tregidga et al. (2018) called for engaging with philosophical underpinnings and hidden assumptions, the world-making possibilities afforded by conceptual opening and upheaval.

### Conceptual openings, beyond anthropocentrism

According to Wright et al. (2013, p. 649), “climate change presents not only a physical (and ecologically material) threat to our existence but also a conceptual challenge to the way in which we imagine that existence”. Climate science, they suggest, does not in itself contain the cultural reflexivity necessary to address this conceptual challenge. As a result, responding to climate change also inevitably means to engage more profoundly with deeply held assumptions about society, not least motivated by how, “[a]s the climate catastrophe unfolds, it will shake the very idea of what it means to be human ever more profoundly” (De Cock et al., 2021, p. 476). Concordantly, Banerjee and Arjaliès (2021) suggest that what’s needed is not primarily more data or evidence on the occurrence of climate change, but novel imaginaries – not based on a notion of human entitlement, extractivist in its practices and inherently colonial, but imaginaries that allow for new ways of understanding the relation between humans and Earth.

Stressing the need to stimulate new forms of noticing, De Cock et al. (2021, p. 476) suggest that “[t]he self-evident demarcations between the human and non-human, between life descriptions and non-life descriptions, thus have to be questioned under the emerging conditions of the climate catastrophe”. In their view, asking such ‘big questions’ allows for organizing to get beyond reactive imaginaries that stand in the way of less anthropocentric organizational possibilities. Indeed, according to Wright et al. (2013), a major reason for the lack of response to the ecological crisis is a limited attention paid to predominant economic, social, and political imaginaries that in different ways “define what knowledge and information is, what relevance we give to it, and how we respond to it” (ibid.). Building on the notion of social imaginary significations (Castoriadis, 1987), they suggest that what’s “represented and embodied in technological optimism, corporate environmentalism, carbon markets and green consumption shape people’s sense of what is permissible, desirable and possible” (Wright et al., 2013, p. 649), resulting in the capitalist and anthropocentric imaginary of climate change discussed above. In resonance with how Campbell et al. (2019) suggest that climate change is unframeable, Wright et al. (2013) suggest that the attempts to encompass climate change with current dominant imaginaries lead to continuous failures. They do not, however, only see this as a problem. Rather, to be forced to make sense of the world differently is also to open a space for unknowing, for eventually, perhaps, profoundly challenging current imaginaries and make way for something new.

## Rethinking ‘human’ as an organizing principle

From the perspective of a critique of anthropocentrism in organization studies, the very notion of the human seems to present itself as a problematic category and organizing principle, namely as one that is detrimental not only to the non-human or more-than-human others that suffer under its entitlement, but also to the very subject it centres on – an organizing principle which threatens to make its own centre of attention, the human, go extinct. This seems highly paradoxical, but also, to build on Wright et al. (2013), highly intriguing. Thus, an engagement with the very notion of ‘human’ might afford conceptual openings to (re)think what it means to organize as humans on Earth. In the following I will delve into an approach, posthumanism, that does just that, and which is gaining momentum also in management and organization studies (e.g. de Vaujany et al., 2024).

## Posthumanism, and the Project at Hand

While the previous section primarily asked ‘what is the problem’, this section primarily asks ‘what are the possibilities’ (n.b., not the solution). The quick answer to that question, as stated before, is to engage with the notion of ‘human’. In this section I will try to elaborate on that answer through the perspective of posthumanism. First by giving a brief overview of posthumanism as a field, then by reflecting on some concepts that are particularly relevant to the aim of my project.

### *A brief overview*

To give an account of the complexity that goes into posthumanism – this entanglement of feminist, postcolonial, new materialist, and other perspectives – is a daunting task indeed. Not least for a second-year doctoral student who just recently stumbled into this posthumanist universe, eager to understand, eager not to totalize. Thus, this account will not be an odyssey through the historical waters of posthumanism’s journey ‘home’ to a defined concept. Mainly because there is no one journey to be told and no final conceptual home to account for. Instead, my account of posthumanism will try to respond to the discussion I’ve had this far, and serve to open for the possibilities I’d like to explore in this project.

## The human as an open notion

The posthumanist universe is a complex and multifaceted one. To start with, there is the overarching notion of the Posthuman, an umbrella term that covers several and very different

schools of thought, such as posthumanism, transhumanism, new materialism, antihumanism and metahumanism (Ferrando, 2019). While both different and alike, what they share is a view of the human as an open notion, as a mutable and non-fixed condition (Ferrando, 2013). My account will focus on posthumanism. However, to help position posthumanism within my previous discussion, it makes sense to also say a few words about transhumanism.

Commonly seen as sub-categories to the Posthuman, posthumanism and transhumanism also tend to be confused as mere variations in a common field. However, they differ vastly in both their genealogy and their purpose, in both their philosophical roots and in what they set out to do (Ferrando, 2018). Transhumanism is about human enhancement, as a way of overcoming the earthly challenges presented to 'Man'. As such, it represents an intensification of humanism (Wolfe, 2009), tightly linked to the Enlightenment ideals of progress and reason (Ferrando, 2019), and strives to transcend the bonds of matter and embodiment. For the transhumanist we are not posthuman yet, but might become, for example with 'mind uploading' or an extended period of habitation on Mars.

Posthumanism, on the other hand, has its roots in postmodern deconstructionism and a critique of the 'human' as a universal notion and experience (Ferrando, 2019). It builds on the many movements during the nineteen seventies to nineties that stressed the social, political, and experiential multiplicity of the human condition, such as postcolonialism and the feminism of the time. Thus, in contrast to transhumanism which has a clear focus on the future, and on transcending the human condition, posthumanism also engages deeply with the present and the past, with how some humans have been considered more humans than others, such as in the history of slavery, racism, sexism, and dis/ableism (ibid.). As such, and in contrast to transhumanism, posthumanism radically embeds the human in a both spatial and temporal, material and embodied entanglement.

### Posthumanism and its critiques

Posthumanism can also be seen as an umbrella term covering several schools of thought, such as critical, cultural, and philosophical posthumanism. These however share a focus on the sub-notions of post-humanism, post-anthropocentrism, and post-dualism (Ferrando, 2019). It might seem a bit confusing at first that a simple hyphen is put in to differentiate the umbrella from one of its sub-notions. And indeed, posthumanism and post-humanism are often used interchangeably, and there are various elaborations on when to use which, and what different usages might afford (e.g. Cozza & Gherardi, 2022; de Vaujany et al., 2024; Ferrando, 2020; Murriss, 2020). However, in my view, the hyphenated notion serves not so much to differentiate

between hyphenated and non-hyphenated, but to enhance and differentiate the three sub-notions of the umbrella term. In other words, while posthumanism can be seen as an overarching perspective or approach, the hyphenated sub-notions put a particular focus on its specific and foundational critiques (Ferrando, 2019), namely essentialism, exceptionalism, and separateness. These critiques in turn also serve as a point of departure to better understand some of the consequences of a posthumanist approach.

With the critique of universalism, post-humanism addresses both the hierarchical function of defining who is human and who is not human (enough), and the multiplicity of what goes into the notion of 'human'. Thus, both addressing the structuring device that for example allows for the differentiated treatment of bodies, such as in variants of colonialism, discrimination, and oppression. And addressing the open-endedness of 'human' as impossible to define by a specific historical or social experience. Post-anthropocentrism, in turn, addresses human exceptionalism, the idea that humans are ontologically separate and unique in relation to other matter, and thus possess a justified entitlement in relation to Earth and its resources of animate and non-animate others. And finally, post-dualism, a critique of the process of separateness itself, of creating binaries such as nature/culture, male/female, human/animal, East/West. Both for how they work to give more value to one over the other, and for how they serve to essentialize, and thus occlude interdependencies and particularities.

Building on the differentiation and the interconnectedness of what's summarized in these critiques, posthumanism aims to deconstruct and decentre the human (de Vaujany et al., 2024; Ferrando, 2020). Viewed from a different angle, the possibility that posthumanism suggests is an affirmative rethinking of the human. That is, a decentring that "does not mean to cancel it, rather to consider that humans are not privileged over materials as the main (and the only) source of action" (Gherardi, 2023, p. 3). Or in the words of Braidotti (2013, pp. 5–6), a possibility to "re-think the basic tenets of our interaction with both human and non-human agents on a planetary scale".

### Relational ontology and human-in-control

Drawing on various sources (e.g. Barad, 2007; Bozalek & Fullagar, 2021; de Vaujany et al., 2024; Gherardi, 2016), there are some concepts that I find particularly intriguing and helpful to think with. One such is the notion of relational ontology. In the posthumanism of Barad (2007), agential realism, this refers to a view of the world as intra-related matter, ontologically inseparable, where entities "do not precede their relationships. They arise through relationships." (Bozalek & Fullagar, 2021, p. 30) This means a decentring of the human as the

agentic source of world-making. Included are not only animate others, but also other matter traditionally considered inanimate, and consequently non-agentic. Thus, the human does not precede, but is “*already a composite of many other kinds of matter existing and acting beyond human control*” (Calás & Smircich, 2023, p. 11, emphasis in original). Agency is not seen as pertaining to specific actors, but “as an emergent effect of a flow of agency in the connections of elements” (Cozza & Gherardi, 2023a, p. 61). As a result, based on this view of all matter as constitutive, the human emerges in an *agencement* or assemblage of endless becoming, a heterogenous linking of elements continuously transforming each other (Gherardi, 2016). In other words, this posthumanist perspective does not conceive of the human as some-‘thing’ that acts upon or detaches itself from a world of external matter. Rather, it sees the human as an entanglement with all matter, as “a specifically differentiated phenomena” (ibid., p. 352), itself emerging from specific intra-actions, or what Ferrando (2020, p. 165) describes as “co-constitutive, embodied, agential processes, situated in specific spatio-temporal environments”.

This view has some implications that speak more directly to the field of organization studies. Reconnecting with the previous section and the issue of the managerial approach to climate change, that discussion could also have been framed as an issue with the imaginary of control, or the illusion of human-in-control (Calás et al., 2023). Apart from rejecting the notion of the world as being *for us*, this posthumanist approach also defies any conception of the (post)human as a universal (Braidotti, 2016). In other words, it draws attention away from the grand narratives such as the Anthropocene, which tend to occlude the issues of who has contributed to and who is suffering under climate change, to instead focus on embodied locality and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991). As such, it also “calls for both a redefinition of ethics and for a deep redefinition of research practices outside of the human-in-control mode of experience” (Gherardi et al., 2024, p. 13). For the researcher, also entangled and becoming in an *agencement*, the idea of methods as a set of procedures to follow becomes impossible to maintain, without falling in the same trap of performing the illusion of human-in-control (ibid.)

However, as stressed by Calás & Smircich (2023, p. 19), “thinking agency as distributed in assemblages does not absolve humans from the consequences of their actions”. Quite the opposite. While conceiving of the world as *beyond us* rather than *for us* in terms of control, the material entanglement of the *agencement* or assemblage also suggests a material accountability. Thus, rather than seeing ethics as a correct response to an externalized other, it would be seen as a “responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming” (Gherardi et al., 2024, p. 11) that the human is also inherently bound to.

### *A personal reading*

As I've mentioned before, posthumanism is a wide and multifaceted field. Concepts are used in various ways, with slight shifts of meaning that are sometimes hard for the novice to grasp. Having laid out what I perceive as the overarching structure of the field, and having described what I perceive as the central critiques and concerns that posthumanism engages with, I now enter into a more personal account. That is, what follows is a reading of posthumanism that centers on the project at hand, that weaves with a number of concepts and perspectives, as a way to find its way. I might have completely misread some authors, or I might draw conclusions that are too far-fetched or overstressed. If so, I beg the reader to help in this navigation. Hand me a compass, throw me a rope, give me a signal that help me untangle, to better understand the complexity and the intricacies of this posthumanist entanglement.

To try to summarize my current view, I see posthumanism as an approach that actively seeks for new ways to understand the human condition, the becoming of human in the world, and the very concrete consequences of how the 'human' is conceived. At the heart, it "is about taking issue with human exceptionalism" (Barad, 2007, p. 136), for example in the way it has played out with the ecological crisis, in how the human has become a geological force in its own right (Steffen et al., 2011). A decentering of the 'human', as mentioned above, is thereby also a decentring of human agency, and a critical engagement with the implications that this centeredness has had, and continue to have. As such, it's part of approaches that suggest a radical ontological shift, from seeing the human as an autonomous actor and subject, to seeing it as inherently entangled with animate and non-animate others. While a critical perspective, I also see it as an affirmative exploration of the possibilities to think of the human otherwise. As I understand it, posthumanism has no desire to establish a new universal (Braidotti, 2016). Thus, posthumanism is not about journeying 'home', as in arriving at a final place of conceptual finality, but rather of journeying out into a messy field of tensions (Daigle, 2023), in an exposure and an education (Ingold, 2014) afforded by its approach.

### Decentred and still attended to

As I briefly touched upon above, while posthumanism takes issue with human exceptionalism, and aims to deconstruct and decentre the 'human', it does not mean to cancel it. As Roelvink (2015, p. 227) puts it, "while posthumanist scholarship decenters the human by highlighting the connections that enable life it also attends to the specificity of the human being" (Roelvink, 2015, p. 227). From a perspective of entanglements, emergence, and agencement, the human is not a being, but a becoming, even a doing. In that sense, wherever humans are, they human

(Ingold, 2015). Which does not inevitably mean, “as an ontology more conventional to the western tradition would have it – to superimpose a preconceived order of their own on a given substrate of nature” (ibid., p. 117). In other words, humaning does not inevitably lead to anthropocentrism, more associated with industrialization and with Enlightenment ideals of progress and growth.

From this perspective, the crux of our predicament, of the physical and ecologically material threat to our existence (Wright et al., 2013), is not that we are humans and that we should be less so, as little as it’s a crux that apes are apes or whales are whales. The crux is perhaps instead the conceptual challenge (ibid.) that comes with the essentialization of all of these, a performative noun-ification that leaves little room for surprise and indeterminacy, and for the wild diversity of life on Earth (Tsing, 2015). Approached as verbs, humans, apes, and whales are not expressed by their essence, but by their doing – their humaning, their aping, their whaling. An expression that itself negates conclusion, as the next doing can always refute that which has been (Levinas, 1987). Thus, rather than actions confirming or refuting our humanness, human is everything that humans do. Warts and all. The whole kit and caboodle.

Returning to climate change as a physical and conceptual challenge, it would seem that, if what we care about as humans is the humaning itself, not the entitlement of humans over others (non-human and human alike), then there’s also an organizational relevance to not get stuck in only addressing the perils of climate change by means of solutionism and control, but also by means of uncertainty and exploration. In other words, rather than trying to manage the existential crisis by stabilizing and clinging to what we seem to know, what we’ve learned to be, there’s the possibility to engage with curiosity and vulnerability in the conceptual challenges that climate change brings, of what it means to become anew with the world, to do otherwise and to ‘create ourselves as we go along’ (Ingold, 2015).

### *The project at hand*

My engagement with the notion of ‘human’ is done in relation to climate change, understood as the current ecological crisis on Earth. While the wider question of ‘what does it mean to be human’ indeed hovers in the background, my focus is on what the ‘human’ does – both in terms of what the notion does as a social imaginary, and what the embodied human performs and enacts in the world. In other words, and in relation to climate change, the problem is not the human per se, but rather the scale of ‘human’ performative impact – both as an imaginary and as a doing. With scale I don’t mean sheer numbers. That is, I don’t approach the entanglement of climate change and ‘human’ as a matter of quantity, such as the number of people on Earth,



of overpopulation. Rather, I approach it as a matter of effectuating ‘human’ as an organizing principle, as a devastatingly successful strategic and structuring device of world-making.

I see climate change as well rooted in the essentialist, exceptionalist, and dualistic soil of colonialism. As a world-making device, colonialism can be seen to have laid the ground for the scale of industrial activity that has made the ‘human’ a primary geological force. As Bamba and Newell (2022, p. 2, emphasis in original) would have it, “the modern world is specifically a *colonial modern* world”. As such, my engagement is also a critique of scalability as a modernist dream of expansion (Tsing, 2012), a logic where the elements, humans and non-humans alike, need to remain unaltered for the sake of growth. According to Tsing, this is a dream that relies on a technology of precision, of expansion without having to rethink basic elements. As such, production is relieved of its relational elements. Relationships, Tsing contends, being encounters across difference, have a quality of indeterminacy and a capacity to produce new agendas. As such, they carry the potential of transformation, a direct threat to the nested scales, neatly coupled up from small to large, that characterise the modernist dream of expansion.

I understand the project of postmodernism as a deconstruction of this modernist dream. Much like Tsing (2015) in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World* sets out to explore what grows in the ruins of capitalism, my project could perhaps be said to be a posthumanist exploration of what grows in the ruins of climate change. I don’t see that as dystopic. Climate change is not just a matter of the future, it is already here, albeit very differently experienced. In that sense, we’re already walking in the ruins, and acknowledging that “can make us more aware of the disjointed and neglected materialities and narratives buried beneath the surface of organization-studies-as-usual” (De Cock & O’Doherty, 2017, p. 146).

Perhaps the opportunity lies in how, as Tsing (2012) has it, the project of scalability was also successful in occluding the insufficiencies of its own practices. For, as she specifically stresses, scalability is never complete: "If the world is still diverse and dynamic, it is because scalability never fulfils its own promises" (ibid, p. 510). And perhaps there is something to be found in these unfulfilled promises, in the small ruptures in everyday anthropocentric relations to Earth, that help in the quest of thinking and doing otherwise (Calás & Smircich, 2023).

## Method and the Field

This section starts with a contextualization of the field, to then go into the specifics of possible methodological approaches. I will begin with how I ended up choosing my field, both in terms of the location and the focus. I will then dwell a bit on a short pre-visit to the field that I did in August this year, and how that further shaped the focus and the practicalities of the study. And finally, I will have a more contextualized discussion on the methodological approaches I envision right now, based on the insights this far and on the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

### Encountering the field

When I first started this PhD, the project was a bit different. The initial idea, very simply put, was to explore the future-making practices of multi-stakeholder initiatives addressing climate change. I planned to attend a number of gatherings here in Sweden, and also follow a number of stakeholders back to their own organizational domains, not least interested in the inconsistencies and the ruptures in overly unflawed projections of human potentiality on the future. What could be learned by exploring the cracks of these more or less triumphant imaginaries?

I still think the idea is good. However, in my own process of knotting the researcher with the field, I felt a distinct dissonance. Perhaps it was too close to my own experience over the last fifteen years of consulting and workshopping in environments that resembled these. Or perhaps some threads that are tightly woven into my own curiosity and understanding of modern society just didn't find relevant threads to coil with in these particular fields.

One such thread is colonialism. Partly raised in the so called Global South, I've felt the far-reaching filament of colonialism on my very skin, and I find it hard to think of climate change without taking that foundational part of industrialization into account (Tsing, 2012). Indeed, as stated in the sixth assessment report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 'Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability' (IPCC, 2022), colonialism should be seen as a factor in the ecological crisis, not only as a historical driver, but as a continuing force (Bhambra & Newell, 2022). Perhaps I didn't look close enough, but I just couldn't see that reflected in these Swedish multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Encountering the field is always a matter of combining the relevance of a site with accessibility and feasibility. Thus, I started considering what fields that could both correspond

with my curiosities and be accessible for me work in. I considered France and Portugal for their colonial pasts and for how colonialism is still a very present albeit contested matter in both countries. However, while I dabble in French and speak Portuguese well, my contacts are limited in both countries and I feared that too much time would go into accessing a field that might end up not being available. This led me to consider Cabo Verde, a group of islands on the west coast of Africa, some 570 kilometres outside Senegal. While I've partly grown up there and speak both Portuguese and Cabo Verdean Creol, the choice was not obvious, not least for the different challenges it poses to research in the so-called Global South as a researcher from the Global North. Yet, in considering the possibility, the stark contrast in how the threading now gained momentum spoke strongly to Cabo Verde as a field, not only as a correspondence of thoughts, but as an expansion of the project and an opening of new paths.

While still about climate change, still about 'stakeholders' in some ways, and still about the ruptures in human imaginaries of what can come to be, the encounter between human and nature more pronouncedly entered the stage. First as a contemplation on water in general, such a precious and paradoxical commodity in a drought ridden country surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean. Then as a reflection on the shoreline, the encounter between land and sea, a fluctuating dichotomous separator perhaps as imaginary as the anthropocentric division of nature and 'Man'. What could be learned by engaging with the organizational encounter of human and ocean, in a country that has seen ships come and go as part of the triangle trade, the exchange of goods, raw materials, and slaves between continents. And that still relies on the ocean, on other continents, on trade, to navigate and mark its presence on the global scene.

### *Cabo Verde, climate change, and the ocean*

Cabo Verde is one of 36 Small Island Developing States (SIDS), a group recognized by the UN in 1992 as a special case for both their environment and development, for their unique social, economic, and environmental challenges (UN, 2024). SIDS are generally susceptible to factors like "small population size, remoteness from international markets, high transportation costs, vulnerability to exogenous economic shocks and fragile land and marine ecosystems" (ibid.), which make them exposed to both economic and ecological challenges.

As stated by UNDP (2024), Cabo Verde is highly vulnerable to climate change, with very limited capacity to adapt without international support. According to the UN Secretary General António Guterres, "Cabo Verde, as is known, is on the frontlines of the existential crisis generated by the climate change" (UN, 2023). Water salination and drought are seen as the greatest constraints to economic development. And the climate variability of the future seems

to pose great challenges, with an expectancy of “more storms, floods, droughts, and a shorter rainy season” (UNDP, 2024).

With only 1% of its territory comprised by land, Cabo Verde’s “economy and prosperity depend on the health and sustainable use of the ocean” (OECD, 2022, p. 8). In 2007 Cabo Verde changed status from a Least Developed Country to a Lower Middle Income Country, largely due to its fast growth of the marine tourism sector, with over 819 000 tourists visiting in 2019, to a nation of approximately 550 000 (ibid.). According to WWF (2024), Cabo Verde is situated in one of the most diverse and important fishing zones in the world, with unique coral reefs and nutrient-rich waters that provide perfect conditions for plankton. As such, it’s a global marine biodiversity hotspot, “supporting a wealth of emblematic and endemic marine species, including 17 species of whale and dolphin, more than 60 shark and ray species, and five species of marine turtle” (Fauna & Flora International, 2024). However, pressure from both tourism and the fishing industry is putting the country’s surrounding ocean at risk (Ocean 5, 2024).

World Bank Group (2024), while acknowledging the challenges that Cabo Verde faces as a SIDS, also highlight the opportunity that come with the country’s extensive Exclusive Economic Zone. As an example, they mention how Cabo Verde “is prioritizing the development of its blue economy to promote economic growth and improve livelihoods while preserving marine ecosystems” (ibid.). Indeed, the Cabo Verdean government also emphasises the ocean as key to the country’s future. As expressed by the Prime Minister of Cabo Verde in 2023, the ocean is the key sector in which the country wants to make its voice heard and increase its relevance on the international arena (UN News, 2023). The country is also recognized as a leader in several ocean-related sectors, notably in finance as the first African nation to establish a blue bond regulation in 2022 (Lilyblad, 2023), and in legal matters, collaborating internationally to propose a UN resolution on ocean rights in 2023 (The Ocean Race, 2023). It was also the third SIDS to join the Ocean Decade Alliance, and one of the first in the world to set up a National Decade Committee, which “actively engages with young professionals, the private sector, decision makers and civil society to expand the Ocean Decade movement at national scale” (Ocean Decade, 2023).

The ocean plays a particular and crucial role in supporting life on Earth, in how it “hosts vast biodiversity and modulates the global climate system by regulating cycles of heat, water and elements, including carbon” (IPCC, 2022, p. 381). In 2017, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2021-2030 the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2024). Or, the Ocean Decade, for short. Under the vision statement, ‘the science we need for the ocean we want’, the Ocean Decade “seeks to stimulate ocean

science and knowledge generation to reverse the decline of the state of the ocean system and catalyse new opportunities for sustainable development of this massive marine ecosystem” (ibid.).

Yet, engaging with the ocean might also present particular ethical challenges. According to Gardiner (2006, 2021), there’s a temporal and spatial dispersion of cause and effect in climate change that also allows for a dispersion of ethics; temporal in how the long-term consequences of climate change lie well beyond a three generation imaginary, and spatial in how, especially for the affluent part of the world, climate change often seems to happen elsewhere. This combination of dispersion of cause and effect and the dispersion of ethics seems particularly striking when it comes to the ocean, “so large, mysterious, and distant that collective imaginaries may see it as endless and bottomless, and therefore able to absorb any pollution, destruction, and litter thrown at it” (Berkowitz, 2023, p. 75). As argued by Gardiner (2021, p. 95), the “temptation to pass the buck to the poor, to other parts of the world, and to the future” runs the risk of reinforcing a discourse, particularly in the global North, that self-deceptively and self-servingly prevents us from addressing the temporal ethics of current imaginaries, and of the futures we make today.

Cabo Verde emerges as a pertinent empirical field, as an agencement of the entanglements of climate change, historically, politically, and environmentally. Initially unpopulated, nationalised by the Portuguese in the fourteen hundreds, an independent country in 1975, Cabo Verde has always been part of the history of colonialism and industrialization, not least as a node in the transatlantic triangle trade lasting for three hundred years. Situated in the brackish waters of Global North and Global South, it’s both at the fringes and at the heart of past and present eurocentrism and anthropocentrism. Looking to the ocean for its survival, it embodies the challenges of becoming with what meets it there, human, non-human, or other.

### *Short reflections from a pre-visit*

In August this year, 2024, I had the chance to make a short pre-visit to Cabo Verde. The plan was to visit the main island, Santiago, and the capital Praia, to get a feel for the resonance and the relevance of my ideas in this particular field, to explore the potential of my network there, and to get a feel for possible collaborations and specific contexts to engage with.

During this trip I got to sit down with a great variety of people. A handful of NGO’s and UN bodies that in different ways engage in matters of biodiversity and marine conservation. A few government officials that in different ways are responsible for matters of the ocean. A number of senior and junior academics, from biologists to sociologists and people in business

administration, who were more or less connected to the ocean, but all with invaluable contacts that they generously shared. And some activists that made causes by different means, from panel discussions and articles, to a weekly snorkelling open to everyone as a sensibilisation to the corals and other endemic species of the ocean. And finally, a lot of other people in the extended network who were happy to share their views on the wider context of Cabo Verde, not only with regards to the ocean.

The greatest outcome of this visit was the insight that Santiago and Praia are not where I was supposed to be. As I came to learn, the island of São Vicente and the city of Mindelo is something of an ocean hub in Cabo Verde. There is the Ministry of the Ocean, concentrating all the relevant administrative functions. There is the administrative authority for the Special Economic Zone, adopted in April 2024 (UNCTAD, 2024). There is the Campus do Mar, gathering research and academia related to the ocean. There is the major environmental NGO. There is the well visited marina, and a commercial and industrial port that receives cruisers and large carriers.

What emerged was sort of a ‘layered’ field, with administration, academia, civil society, corporations, and activists, all in one way or another engaged with the ocean, and gathered in a rather small geographical area. This gave me the idea to explore human ocean entanglements not only in a specific area, but across these layers, as performed and transformed also by the wider agencement of the field.

## Methodology

Up until now, much of this text has been about the question ‘what’, and of course ‘why’. Stepping into methodology, the question now becomes ‘how’. This ‘how’ should of course cater to the research question that guides this project: *How are human ocean entanglements differentiated and performed in the everyday practices of organizing with the ocean?* In a wider sense, the ‘how’ should cater to the character of my curiosity, the theoretical framing and approach, the specificities of the field, and my own experience and capabilities. What I present and reflect upon here is tentative, and I would love to explore both the appropriateness and the feasibility of my approach, and also what other approaches that might serve the task and the aim.

### *Qualitative, agential*

Broadly speaking I take a qualitative approach. More specifically I take inspiration from current social anthropological ways of engaging with a field – participative and immersive approaches,

also sensitive to the many boundary and role challenges that come with fieldwork. Taking the ‘layeredness’ of my field into account, and my curiosity about human ocean entanglements throughout these different fields, I see my overarching approach as one of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). This method, “designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations” (ibid, p. 105), commonly centres around *following*, e.g., people, things, metaphors, or practices, as they travel and manifest across settings. So, the focus is not on a specific case or organization, but rather on the variability of a phenomena across domains. As such, the *following* is done in a dispersed research field, yet in what can be seen as a single site of transversal relations (Andersson, 2014), which can span a specific area or extend across the globe. That site of transversal relations is not merely a spatial one, but also for example temporal and technological (in the widest sense of the word, from cell phones to fishing rods). In other words, the human ocean entanglements that I’m curious to follow might travel in all of these, and other, domains.

This is already a focus on processes and flows. But to try to think with posthumanism, with relational ontology and the critique of essentialism, the following of people, things, metaphors, or practices, would not be one of following autonomous entities, distinct subjects, but rather to follow the “performative flow of material-discursive practices” (Hultin & Introna, 2019, p. 1362). In other words, to follow the endless becoming of human ocean relations as an *agencement*, as a heterogenous combination of materials continuously transforming each other (Gherardi, 2016).

It’s perhaps worth elaborating briefly on the notion of material-discursive practices. Reconnecting with post-dualism (Ferrando, 2019) and agential realism (Barad, 2007), the notion of material-discursive builds on a view of the material and the discursive as ontologically inseparable (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015). As such, discourse in for example speech, public records, or emails, does not pre-exist its specific materiality. And materiality is not seen as static, not as a thing, but as a doing. So, rather than focusing on what discourse represents, or on what materiality mediates, the focus is on materialization, on how material-discursive practices, seen as performative, as constitutive, configure reality.

I don’t know how closely I will end up adhering to this view, but I find it helpful to think with, as it also speaks to a situatedness of becoming, particular but also in constant flow. In my case, a continuous materialization of human ocean entanglements, beyond mere representational accounts or interpreted matter. An intriguing way to look at world-making.

This perspective of continuity and flow also points to an interesting possibility to look for the breaks, the ruptures, the dissonances. Not as weaknesses, but as openings. In other words,

an attention to the productive vulnerabilities in the encounter, or in the agencement, of human ocean entanglements. In that sense, ruptures could also matter in how they evade the illusion of control. In a climate crisis that is fraught with ruptures in the very understanding of what it means to human, instead of seeking comfort in what might prevent ruptures or mitigate their effects, there's a creative potential in tending to them, to the breakdowns, to moments, patterns, and practices that open to a knowledge space beyond the certainty of human-in-control.

*Post-qualitative, diffractive*

As such, I'm also curious about taking a post-qualitative approach, to go beyond the practice of research as human-in-control, evading pre-defined ways of knowing, instead seeing methodology as something that develops in the field, with the field (de Vaujany et al., 2024). Not only for how it allows for the unexpected, but also for the ethics of what it means to 'know', as in who gets to know what with whom, who gets to be known and knowing, and who gets to convey, relate, and be listened to. While I'm out there looking for human ocean agencements, there is also the research agencement that I'm part of, or rather, that I emerge in myself, entangled as I am with all materialities. According to Gherardi et al. (2024), this makes it impossible to think of method as a set of procedures to follow. While I might not be able to go as far as St. Pierre (2021) suggests, and refuse any pre-existing research methodology, I see a great value in thinking with the post-qualitative approach as a questioning of the researcher as human-in-control. As I've mentioned before, I see research as an exposure and an education (Ingold, 2014), a learning with, not a knowing about. As such, method is performative, so that the 'object' is not known but made along the process, and 'knowing' the world is done by being part of it (de Vaujany et al., 2024).

This also matters to analysis. Here I'm curious about the notion of diffraction (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2000; Murriss, 2021), as a way of analysis that traces intra-actions and relationalities, where sets of material are read through each other. I might for example read human narratives about fishing practices through the behavior of ocean currents and legal regulations on marine conservation, or read a fisher's account of changing fish patterns through oceanographic studies of shifting marine ecosystems due to climate change. Not as a matter of looking for causalities or correspondences. The aim would instead be to allow for an analysis based on how all materialities come together to constitute the organizing practices with the ocean. So, rather than applying predetermined frameworks to 'make sense of data', it would allow for the fieldwork material to 'talk back' in unexpected ways (Murriss, 2021).



It's not as mysterious as it sounds. I will hang out with people, talk to them, reflect (or diffract) with them, look and smell and listen with them, make fieldnotes and 'write up' after having been 'out in the field', search for patterns and anomalies, and bounce of what emerges with those involved. In that sense, the specificity of a post-qualitative approach would not primarily be in the what of the doing, but in the how of being there and of writing about it.

Again, the exposure is essential. The process will be overwhelming, and it should. The amount of 'data', of text and other materials that will be made throughout the process will be daunting and plentiful. This will be heavily dependent on immersion, not only in the field but in the material. On patience, on time, on meticulous tracing and serendipitous mistakes. Most of all, perhaps, it will rely on vulnerability, on embracing uncertainty, multiplicity, and the unknown as productive forces in analysis.

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